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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL JANUARY PD ACTIVITIES

11. Summary: Istanbul PAS activities in January 2007 included organizing an official visit by the Consul General to Kocaeli, an industrial province east of Istanbul; a round-table discussion with a group of young journalists; and a radio interview with one of Turkey's leading intellectuals. In all cases, the CG was called to defend U.S. policies in Iraq and our cooperation with Turkey in combating the PKK. The atmosphere in these conversations was consistently cordial, but it was clear that Iraq and the PKK continue to be the benchmark issues by which the public gauges the Turkey-U.S. relationship. The Armenia "Genocide" Resolution had not yet hit the public consciousness. End Summary

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CG Visit to Industrial Province, Kocaeli  
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12. CG Jones began her January 17 PAS-organized visit to the industrial province of Kocaeli (population 1.3 million), the richest province in Turkey, by making courtesy calls on Governor Gokhan Sozer and Mayor Ibrahim Karaosmanoglu. Sozer, a career politician, assumed his current position only in October 2006, after serving as district governor in a number of other provinces and governor of Yozgat in Central Anatolia. Karaosmanoglu, an Izmit native, is a founding member of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) party and served as Chairman of the AK Party in Kocaeli before becoming mayor in 2004.

13. Both politicians cited the influx of hundreds of thousands of unskilled and in many cases illiterate internal migrants, resulting in homelessness and widespread unemployment, as the major challenge for the province. Traffic was another major area of concern. They highlighted their success in cleaning up industrial waste as the most significant achievement. In response to the CG's question about the level of cooperation between the province/municipality and private sector, Sozer and Karaosmanoglu replied that the private sector, especially through the Chamber of Industry, had assisted in constructing housing units, in particular following the devastating 1999 earthquake.

14. The CG's discussions with the Chairman and ten members of the Board of the Chamber of Industry, one of the most active in Turkey, focused not only the province's industrial-based economy, which accounts for 13 percent of Turkey's industrial production, but also U.S. foreign policy, especially in Iraq. Board members were openly critical of U.S. policy in Iraq, in particular of our apparent reluctance to pursue PKK leaders in the North.

15. CG Jones toured the \$1.5 billion Ford Otosan factory, which employs 8,000 local workers and was selected as the "Best Ford Brand Assembly Plant in Europe" for the last five years. Ford operations in Turkey are owned in equal partnership by Koc Holding and Ford Motor Company; it is the market leader in total automotive sales in Turkey.

¶6. Finally, the CG met with the rector of Kocaeli University, one of the top ten universities in Turkey, to discuss student exchanges, the Fulbright program, and upcoming cultural events that PAS is organizing in Kocaeli.

¶7. In a city that receives few official foreign visitors, the CG's presence was a major event, covered by all local media, including television, radio and news websites. A very positive interview with the province's largest circulating newspaper, "Kocaeli," (circulation: 10,000) was published on January 19. Topics ranged from the CG's visit to Kocaeli to U.S. policy in Iraq. Kocaeli's television station, TV41, broadcast a lengthy story about her visit during its January 17 primetime newscast.

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CG Hosts Young Journalists  
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¶8. As part of Post's ongoing effort to identify talented young journalists and editors, CG Jones on January 24 hosted eight Turkish journalists under age 40, representing both print and television media outlets. For several, it was the first time they had been invited to a PAS-organized event. The assassination of journalist Hrant Dink was a main topic - the journalists had all covered story and were clearly deeply affected, but most doubted that his death would result in a closer examination of "the events of 1915" or in a reversal or even watering down of Article 301. One TV broadcaster (STAR TV) predicted that "all will be forgotten in 15 days." Only one journalist disagreed, saying that Dink's death would bring about the start of a reconciliation process. Several journalists pointed to the upswing in internet usage among young people over the past few years, providing an efficient medium for radical ideas to be spread among the unemployed.

¶9. On the PKK, a top TV broadcaster for CNN-Turk, renowned for his  
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reporting from Iraq, strongly criticized the U.S. for not capturing PKK leaders in Northern Iraq, commenting that any journalist could identify their location.

¶10. The CG's question about the influence of Turkish religious and education leader Fettullah Gulen, currently residing in the U.S., and whether he intended to remain abroad or return to Turkey, elicited little response, underscoring the sensitivity of this issue. The journalists unanimously agreed that the passage of an Armenian "Genocide" resolution by the House of Representatives would seriously harm U.S.-Turkey relations. Although they realized that the U.S. Administration would not support such a congressional resolution, the average man on the street would not understand the distinction.

¶11. The CG asked about the various associations of journalists and whether there was an effective way for journalists from different media outlets and but sharing similar beats to organize meetings on subjects of common interest, such as the National Press Club in the U.S. It appears that there is no such organization in Istanbul, but several guests thought it would be useful.

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CG GRANTS RADIO INTERVIEW IN COMMEMORATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING,  
JR.  
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¶12. During a one-hour interview on January 15 with Istanbul's premier radio station targeting opinion leaders (Acik Radio), the CG focused not only on the life and legacy of the civil rights leader, but also on current topics including U.S. policies in Iraq and U.S.-Turkey relations. In her remarks about Iraq, the CG drew an analogy with America's own historical struggles as a young democracy, describing in particular the advances the U.S. has made in the area of civil and human rights with the help of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Istanbul's opinion leaders, generally fed a heavy dosage of analysis highly critical of U.S. policies in Iraq and the Middle East, were reminded of American values such as tolerance, justice and compassion as represented by Martin Luther

King, Jr.

¶13. Comment: Not surprisingly, Iraq and the PKK in Northern Iraq continue to be at the forefront of the Turkish public's concern regarding the U.S.-Turkey relationship. We used these three visits/events, as well as many other opportunities, not only to explain the USG position, but also to highlight deeply held American values such as democracy and freedom of speech. All of our interlocutors appreciated our willingness to hear their opinions and to engage in an open and honest dialogue.

JONES